

Feckenham Parish Council Newsletter

Number 1
April 2008



The processes of local government can be a mystery to many people, not least those involved with the Parish Council.

So welcome to a short publication that attempts to throw some light on what is being done on your behalf and to invite feedback on whether you feel they are the right things.

Dear Parishioner,

When this particular group of Councillors was elected in May 2007, we resolved to keep the village a little more informed about what we were doing in their name. A number of us had been very closely involved in the process of creating the Parish Plan and the issues that had raised that were deemed important to the community as a whole. This short Newsletter is designed to give you an update on what we have done so far, and intend to do in the near future. It adds to what can be found on the website www.feckenham.com . We hope you find it informative. We would welcome any feedback on the content and the issues that it may raise for you. You can do that either through the website, www.feckenham.com , or by contacting the Chair, Jeff Matthews at 8 The Square, Feckenham or on 01527 894801. Even better, if you feel motivated by what people are looking to achieve, then get involved with any of the Parish Groups. Your support would be appreciated.

The Work of the Parish Council and the Parish Plan Groups

The Parish Council consists of a group of seven representatives from the community, Councillors. Elected every 4 years, the role is voluntary and its responsibilities governed carefully by statute. It is required to have an annual meeting, elect a responsible Finance Officer and have at least 3 other meetings in the year (in practice we have been meeting monthly during 2007). Amongst those responsibilities laid down are things to do with planning, maintenance of public spaces and representation of the Parish views in a number of regional forums. Traditionally, compared with other Parish Councils around the Country, Feckenham PC, has maintained a comparatively low profile – we don't own or run anything directly. Our preference in this village has been to run things through autonomous groups or other bodies, with the Parish Council giving grants, where appropriate, to support their work – the Village Hall, the Amenity Trust being examples. It is our intention to continue this policy, by encouraging and supporting the setting up of a number of village action groups which have emerged from the Parish Plan as being important. These were detailed in the Parish Plan, published last year.

To remind you these Action Groups are concerned with:

- Flood Prevention
- Creating a Community Shop
- Influencing Traffic and Parking

This short report details the work of these groups so far, on your behalf.

In a final section, we outline the plans that the Parish Council has in relation to some projects that we feel are our responsibility to move forward and also our plans with regard to finances and the Parish precept – the part of the Council Tax that comes to the Parish.

We hope you find this useful.

Yours sincerely,

Your Parish Council

Andrew Henson, Vice Chair

Judy Hooker, Councillor

Jessica James, Councillor

Pam Lincoln-Lewis, Councillor

Jeff Matthews, Chair

John Roundell, Councillor

Tim Smith, Councillor

Flood Prevention Group: Update

Following the publication of the Feckenham Parish Plan 2006 a number of working groups have been set up to seek ways of acting on the issues identified by the surveys and analysis contained within the Plan. One of the top five issues identified was Flood Prevention; as a result a group has been formed at the end of June 2007 with the support of the Feckenham Parish Council to address this issue and has been very active over the past 6 months.

Whilst the dramatic flooding of July certainly raised the profile of the problem to Redditch Borough Council and Worcestershire County Council, the extent of the major problem across the county has meant that Feckenham's difficulties seemed small by comparison. However, the group has been working to make Borough and County Council officers as well as the Environment Agency aware of our problems and to try and work out how best to tackle them.

Throughout this time the group have also been logging any flooding, especially when homes have been affected and would like anyone who has experienced any flooding to contact us either by email (ParishPlan@Feckenham.com) or by telephoning Marion Chute 892285 or Tim Smith 892834.

Summary of findings and actions

- Inaugural meeting held 28th June 2007.
- Article published in the August Feckenham News requesting that those affected by flooding within the Parish get in touch.
- A summary of properties affected by the 20th July flood was provided to and acknowledged by Redditch Borough Council.
- Feckenham village water courses (Bow Brook, Swans Brook and Plack Brook including the pipe along Astwood Lane) have been walked to assess obstructions and bottle necks, this has been followed up by walking the Feckenham water courses with representatives from of Worcester County Council, Redditch Borough Council and the Environment Agency (see notes below).
- Letter sent 29th August to Worcestershire County Council (Director of Environmental Services and Special Projects (Flood) Team), Redditch Borough Council, The Environment

Agency and Severn Trent requesting support to reduce the risk of flooding to properties within Feckenham.

Representatives of Worcester County Council, Redditch Borough Council and the Environment Agency joined members of the Flood Prevention Group and Borough Councillor Mike Chalk for a site visit on Thursday 10th January to discuss our problems. The visit confirmed some actions that could be put in place to reduce the threat of flooding, briefly these comprise

Improvements to drainage from Droitwich Road into Bow Brook.

Removal of pinch points identified in the Plack Brook.

Regular maintenance of local water courses, particularly entrances to culverts.

There is a Worcestershire Joint Scrutiny exercise looking at flooding and Councillor Mike Chalk is the Redditch Borough Council representative, the visit to Feckenham on Thursday 10th January has provided Mike with a full understanding of how we are affected by flooding.

A mapping exercise has been undertaken to identify all of the drains and culverts in the Parish where flooding occurs and ascertain whether they are blocked or damaged. A summary is being prepared and will be passed to the appropriate County Council Office and an improved maintenance schedule will be requested.

Letter sent 2nd September to The Director of West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy, highlighting our concern that any decision to build extensively in the Redditch area should take into account the affect on neighbouring low lying areas (such as Feckenham) due to increased hard standing and water roll off.

One of the most persistent and regular flooding hotspots is at the corner of Swansbrook Lane and Astwood Lane and the group has been corresponding with the developers involved with the affordable housing project (West Mercia Housing Group) in that area to ensure that the problem is not worsened by the development. To follow is a summary of how the both the foul water and storm water will be dealt with which we learnt through meeting with the developers, contractors and civil engineer in December 2007.

The site situated in a slope to the edge of the village of Feckenham (Astwood Lane) and no foul water drainage (toilets, sinks, baths etc) or storm water drainage (rainwater) are near to the site.

The foul water drainage will be dealt with by installing a pipe from the site, into Astwood Lane, and then up Swansbrook Lane. Where the public footpath meets Swansbrook Lane (about half way to the School), the drainage will then turn left into the field, and follow the hedge line until it meets the Severn Trent adopted foul sewer. The whole length of this sewer including the part on the proposed development will be adopted by Severn Trent Water, which means that they will have the responsibility for it and its maintenance.

The storm water drainage is quite difficult on this site, due to its location, the clay grounds and the absence of any storm water drainage in the area. Severn Trent has allowed connection of the storm water drainage to the foul sewer, however, only a limited amount at a time. Therefore a large tank (large pipes) will be installed within the development which will store this water. A flow restricting device will also be fitted, which will limit the flow from this storm water tank into the foul sewer. This tank has been designed to cope with rare and extreme rainfall events, based on the latest Environment Agency modelling techniques.

No storm water will flow from the site onto the local roads and contribute to the flooding issues that already exist there. As the development takes the flows from its own area, and re-directs them to the foul sewer in a controlled manner, it will actually help towards reducing the flooding on the roads, however, this may not be measurable, but every little bit will help.

Key Next Steps

Development and implementation of a plan to address the following:

- Improve the drainage from Droitwich Road into Bow Brook.
- Remove pinch points identified in the Plack Brook.
- Regular maintenance of local water courses, particularly entrances to culverts.
- Request for regular clearing and maintenance programme of drains by Worcester County Council.

On behalf of the Feckenham Parish Flood Prevention Group, Tim Smith, Feckenham Parish Council

Community Shop Action Group: Update

Begun by the Parish Plan Group and supported by the Parish Council, the Shop Group as it was called, has now become the Feckenham Community Shop Association Limited.

The purpose of this organisation is to create a viable community shop, providing a local alternative to the Supermarket, supporting local food producers and offering another focal point for village life and the chance to meet.

It has been necessary to create a limited company in order to provide a proper organised approach to this commercial venture. However, it is a community company in that any surplus made will be ploughed back into developing the business and in the long term, if very successful those surpluses will be made available to the community.

A first draft business plan has been created and that is forming the basis of the discussions with the various interested parties. We aim to be able to present a full picture of the development at an Open Day, scheduled for May, by which time we should have a much better picture of the shop, its location, stock and a schedule for opening. However, you will appreciate there are a number of hurdles to be cleared.

In the meantime, we can tell you that we are in very active discussions with Barrett's of Feckenham, Redditch BC, a number of potential suppliers and other supporting groups to bring the plans to fruition. The signs are encouraging for something this year.

There is the opportunity to support this community venture by taking a share in the business. Because it is a community based venture each individual is entitled to own one share. (Multiple share ownership is not permitted, thus ensuring that the Community Shop cannot be "taken over" or "sold"). At this stage of the project's development, we need funds simply to meet the set up costs. To that end, shareholding is important, not only as revenue, but also as a sign of the commitment from the community to support the venture. Please call Jeff Matthews on 892180 for an application form for your share, or complete the one enclosed with this publication.

There are also a number of fund raising activities planned. These include a race night scheduled for May 3rd, a coffee morning, cheese and wine evening, a concert and a variety of other activities (see the Parish Magazine for detail). If you would like to support any of these or offer to promote your own event please contact Jenny Mason on 892678.

Affordable Housing

After a great deal of effort, on the part of Antonia Pulsford and the previous Parish Council, notably Doug Hickman, the Parish now has some provision for affordable housing. You cannot have failed to notice that building work has begun on the land granted by George Yeates just before his death. It is expected that they will be completed Sept/Oct time.

We have now been informed by Redditch BC that the allocation process for these properties is about to begin.

If living in such a property is something for you and if you have a connection with the village – relatives, were born here etc, then you may be entitled to preference when these are allocated.

However, you need to be registered with Redditch BC. There is a leaflet enclosed with this publication that explains more. Contact Redditch BC for further information. Be aware that there is a deadline of 22nd April to register, so you need to move quickly.

Traffic Group: Update

In early Spring 2007 the Action Group dealing with parking issues was set up. Headed by Russell Cotton the Working Party identified sixteen sites within the village where problems or queries existed. At this stage efforts were made to obtain copies of the parking regulations in order to identify which sites were legally signed and therefore enforceable as opposed to any defective or illegal markings. Research did reveal however, that Redditch Borough Council had been investigating the proposal to operate Civil Parking Enforcement by the Council within the Borough of Redditch. If adopted Parking Enforcement would be decriminalised and transferred from a Police Function to a service controlled by RBC.

In the Summer, headed by Keith French, a Working Party responsible for examining speeding issues within the Parish was formed. It soon became evident that vehicular traffic was not the only problem as pedestrian traffic was suffering from the poor state, inadequate, and even in some parts of the village, the lack of, pavements/footpaths. In addition neglected repair of roads and pavements was cause for concern.

In all three areas regulations pertaining to Health and Safety were deemed to be an issue and therefore, together with other considerations it was agreed that the two Groups be amalgamated and the Feckenham Parish Plan Traffic Management Group (FPPTMG) was formed.

One of the initial actions was to pursue the request for details of the parking regulations. Eventually on this and other relevant matters such as speeding in various locations within the Parish, a meeting was held with County Councillor Philip Gretton and Borough Councillor Brandon Clayton. The Councillors were told of the extreme difficulties that had been experienced in respect of obtaining copies of the regulations, and the fact that contrary to the County Council's assertions that the parking signage in the village is legal, according to the Police the double yellow lines are not enforceable due to broken lines and other incorrect features.

At the conclusion of the meeting Councillor Gretton stated he would discuss all matters with County Council staff (Debbie Degge) and advised that the best way forward, once details of the parking regulations were in our possession and a dossier of our findings in relation to the speeding and parking issues had been completed, was to present our recommendations to the County Council. He also suggested we attempted to secure the services/expertise of a town planner/civil engineer for the purpose of assessing the feasibility of our recommendations.

Preceding this meeting site inspections had been made in relation to the speeding problems in Alcester/Droitwich Road and Sillins Lane, Elcocks Brook. Photographs and measurements were taken and site plans are now being drawn up. In addition a questionnaire has been prepared for distribution to residents in all areas affected by speeding vehicles, a copy of which will be presented to the Parish Council prior to circulation.

To conclude it would appear that the approach for advice made to County Hall by Philip Gretton was not successful. In an email dated mid December he stated that the response received from Debbie Degge was unsatisfactory and he was not happy with it. Details of her response are not known at this time but our endeavours to resolve the numerous problems will recommence in early 2008.
Keith French, Chair, FPPTMG

Other Council Work

Our major activity this year has been centred on re-building the Council after the disappearance of the Clerk, just over 12 months ago. Following excellent work by Phil Tricklebank and Ian Bellion, we were able to reconstruct many of the Council's records and processes. This work has been continued by the new Clerk, Sean Arble, appointed in August supported by John Roundell and Andrew Henson.

All sorts of new, boring but important bits and pieces have had to be put in place to get the Council on an even keel around standing orders and governance. This has largely been achieved now, including setting a new budget strategy and looking to create more financial reserves as a mitigation of the potential risks we face. More on that below.

Of more direct interest to Parishioners is some exciting work on the appointment of a "Parish Lengthsman" – an ancient position that roughly equates to "odd jobs person". In times gone by, they were responsible for hedges and ditches, now it can be anything we want them to do, to the benefit of the Community. We are able to reclaim monies from the County for approved projects – having paid for the work first. We are now actively looking for someone to contract these services from, the enclosed leaflet has details or call the Clerk for further information.

Budget and Precept

The Council is funded through a small charge included within the Council Tax for each household within the Parish and which collectively forms the Council's precept. Ahead of each financial year which runs April to March, the Council considers and debates what it would need to spend to achieve its aims and what it can reasonably request as its precept.

Our aims for 2008/09 reflect a broader range of aims and issues that affect the Parish and the Council. These include;

The ability to consider, and where appropriate, offer grants to groups such as the Parish Plan action groups.

Funding to reduce and mitigate risks the Council faces. From the outset of the budgeting process the Council undertook a risk assessment to identify potential risks. It is planned that part of the precept for future years will be used to build the Council's financial reserves so that the Council has the financial means to deal with risks as they arise. A small amount of funding has been allocated to Councillor training and additional insurance cover for the Council as it undertakes its work.

Improved communication with the Parish. We have budgeted to create a Parish Council notice board and continue to produce newsletters like this one.

The Council also pays for

- A part-time clerk who manages the administrative side of the Council
- Maintenance and replanting of the large flower tubs
- Audit and local council association fees
- Hire of the village hall for Parish Council Meetings

For the year 2007/08 the Council received a precept of £6,402. For 2008/09 this will increase to £7,990 but still only represents an average of £23 per household or £2 per month.

For more information and keeping up with Parish matters, see the website www.feckenham.com .

Next Parish Council Meeting: 15th May, 7:30pm

Including The Annual Parish Meeting

If you would like to raise any issue concerning the work of the Parish Council, please contact any of the Councillors or come along to the meeting, in person.

**Parish Clerk: Sean Arble, 34 The Close, Cleeve
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sean.arble@googlemail.com**